



StrongSchoolsNC

Requirements and Recommendations for Recess, Specials, and General Activities

March 4, 2021

This document brings together the best guidance available for NC's schools, building out recommendations based on [CDC guidelines](#), youth and gym requirements, and nationwide best practices. This guidance outlines specifically what is required and recommended for schools conducting recess, specials and general activities.

Research continues to emerge on the activities described below, and this document will be updated to reflect significant changes in scientific findings. It is important for local education leaders to recognize that there are a variety of products being marketed to education institutions across the country to help slow the spread of COVID-19, such as specialized masks and covers for individuals singing or playing musical instruments, that do not yet have a clear evidence base. Additionally, you will notice recommendations to move activities outdoors when possible. However, it is important to note that while the probability of transmission of COVID-19 is lower outside, it is not zero. Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission.

With this in mind, we know that [the three Ws](#) remain the most important prevention practices for all of NC's students and staff: Wear a cloth face covering at all times, Wait 6 feet apart and keep that distance consistently, and Wash your hands regularly. The guidance below will help school administrators, music directors, coaches, and students participating in extracurriculars make thoughtful decisions to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their schools and communities.

All School Activities

Schools are **required** to:

- Ensure that any activity taking place on public school grounds must meet all requirements in either Plan A or Plan B operation in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#). These requirements include six (6) feet of social distancing (Plan B), wearing a cloth face covering, screening for COVID-19 symptoms upon entry, frequent handwashing, and surface cleaning.
- As stated in [Executive Order No. 180](#) on November 23, 2020, ensure that face coverings are worn by all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children age five (5) or older. In all public and nonpublic schools, all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children five (5) years or older must wear face coverings when indoors, at all times, unless an exception applies, and when outdoors and within six (6) feet of another person, unless an exception applies.

Outdoor Recess

Schools are **required** to:

- Establish a schedule for and perform ongoing routine environmental [cleaning and disinfection](#) of playground equipment, using [EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2](#).
- Increase the frequency of disinfection during higher-density times.
- Limit the use of shared equipment, such as balls, jump ropes, or other toys.
- Disinfect any shared objects.
- Ensure that any individual entering a public-school facility or visiting public school grounds, such as a school's playground, is required to wear a cloth face covering (ages 5 and up), pass a COVID-19 symptom screening, and must meet all requirements in either Plan A or Plan B operation in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#).
- If students and staff age 5 or older are outside for recess and are consistently maintaining 6 feet of social distancing at all times, they are not required to wear masks, unless an exception applies.
- If students and staff age 5 or older are outside for recess and are within 6 feet of distance from each other, they are required to wear masks, unless an exception applies.

It is recommended that schools:

- Post signage outdoors that is eye-catching and understandable to all audiences to reinforce social distancing measures, such as designated play areas, tape on the ground measuring six (6) feet, etc.
- Promote hand washing before and after use of shared equipment.
- Label containers for clean or unused equipment/toys, and for those that need cleaning.
- Keep students and teachers in small cohort groups throughout the day that do not mix, including during recess.
- Stagger recess times so that the overall number of people on the playground at one time is reduced.

Music

All Music Activities

Schools are **required** to:

- Ensure that any individual entering a public-school facility or visiting public school grounds, such as a school's auditorium for a rehearsal or performance as the performer or an attendee, is required to wear a cloth face covering (ages 5 and up), pass a COVID-19 symptom screening, and must meet all requirements in either Plan A or Plan B operation in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#).
- Ensure that face coverings are worn by all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children age five (5) or older. In all public and nonpublic schools, all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children five (5) years or older must wear face coverings when indoors, at all times, unless an exception applies, and when outdoors and within six (6) feet of another person, unless an exception applies.

Band

It is recommended that schools:

- Increase the use of percussion and string instruments which will more readily allow for players to wear their masks for the duration of the rehearsal or performance.
- Build in designated times at the beginning and end of lessons to ensure proper cleaning and disinfection of the instruments and space, and have every musician be accountable for their own instrument.
- Conduct rehearsals/performance in open-air theaters or outside on fields/playgrounds to maintain at least six (6) feet of social distancing and ventilation.
- If rehearsals/performance are inside, maximize distance between performers, listeners, (also consider the conductor) by performing in a larger venue, while meeting any applicable mass gathering limits for that venue.
- Review and implement applicable ventilation recommendations outlined in the [StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit](#).
- Consider the use of plexiglass barriers as an additional mitigation effort on top of cloth face coverings to potentially reduce respiratory droplet transmission.

Singing (e.g., choir, glee club, a cappella, musical theater)

It is recommended that schools:

- Limit singing and stage-acting with significant voice projection that may increase respiratory droplets, even when wearing masks.
- Conduct rehearsals/performance in open-air theaters or outside on fields/playgrounds to maintain at least six (6) feet of social distancing and ventilation.
- If rehearsals/performance are inside, maximize distance between performers, listeners, (also consider the conductor) by performing in larger venue, while meeting any applicable mass gathering limits for that venue.
- Review and implement applicable ventilation recommendations outlined in the [StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit](#).
- Consider the use of plexiglass barriers as an additional mitigation effort on top of cloth face coverings to potentially reduce respiratory droplet transmission.
- Post signage backstage to reinforce social distancing measures and mask-wearing.
- Limit the use of shared equipment, such as props, makeup, or costumes.
- Disinfect any shared objects.

School Athletic Activities and Physical Education

Schools are required to:

- Ensure that any individual entering a public-school facility or visiting public school grounds, such as a school's soccer field as an athlete, coaching staff, or a spectator, is required to wear a cloth

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face covering (ages 5 and up), pass a COVID-19 symptom screening, and must meet all requirements in either Plan A or Plan B operation in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#).

- Choose physical education activities that limit the use of shared equipment, and any close contact between students during those activities is limited and brief.
- For athletics games/sporting events, follow all up-to-date requirements related to spectators, including occupancy limitations, as outlined in NCDHHS [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Participants of Youth and Amateur Sports Programs](#).
- Ensure that face coverings are worn by all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children age five (5) or older. In all public and nonpublic schools, all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children five (5) years or older must wear face coverings when indoors, at all times, unless an exception applies, and when outdoors and within six (6) feet of another person, unless an exception applies.
 - Ensure that adults and children age five (5) or older wear a mask according to the requirements above, whether they are actively playing, while on the sidelines, in the locker-room, etc.

It is **strongly recommended** that schools:

- Follow all other NCDHHS [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Participants of Youth and Amateur Sports Programs](#) recommendations.

It is **recommended** that schools:

- Hold athletic activities and physical education activities outside on fields/playgrounds to maintain at least six (6) feet of social distancing and ventilation.
- Establish a schedule for and perform ongoing routine environmental [cleaning and disinfection](#) of shared sports equipment and locker-room using [EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2](#).
- Schedule games to include adequate buffer times between play to allow for proper disinfection protocols and for athletes, coaches and staff to enter and exit the facility with limited interaction and social distancing.
- Remind individuals not to shake hands, give high fives, or fist pumps.
- Avoid up close face-to-face communication.
- Remind individuals to bring their own water bottles, and that those water bottles are not shared.
- Limit use of hydration stations (e.g., water cows, water troughs, water fountains) and provide disposable cups or labeled water bottles for individuals when using any water fountains.

General Activities (non-athletic, non-music; e.g., art, tutoring, volunteering, book club, robotics club, computer/technology club):

Schools are **required** to:

- Limit the use of shared equipment, such as writing utensils, paint brushes, construction tools, and headphones.
- Disinfect any shared objects.

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- Ensure that any individual entering a public-school facility or visiting public school grounds, such as someone visiting campus for tutoring, or any after school activity instructors, is required to wear a cloth face covering (ages 5 and up), pass a COVID-19 symptom screening, and must meet all requirements in either Plan A or Plan B operation in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#).
- Ensure that face coverings are worn by all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children age five (5) or older. In all public and nonpublic schools, all workers, teachers, guests, other adults and children five (5) years or older must wear face coverings when indoors, at all times, unless an exception applies, and when outdoors and within six (6) feet of another person, unless an exception applies.

For general after school activities, it is recommended that schools:

- Pursue avenues for virtual convenings as much as possible, or hold activities outside to maintain at least six (6) feet of social distancing and ventilation.
- If another teacher's classroom is being used, ensure that supplies needed for mitigation protocols (such as disposable masks, hand sanitizer, desks placed for 6 feet of social distancing) are left exactly as they were found.